

January 10, 2024

West Palm Beach's hip Nora district to get a Brooklyn pizza staple

Juliana's Pizza, a Brooklyn staple considered among the top U.S. pies, is slated to take space in Nora, the \$1 billion dining and entertainment district under construction north of the downtown.

Alexandra Clough

Palm Beach Post

The hunt for authentic New York-style pizza in West Palm Beach soon will be over, thanks to the pending arrival of a celebrated pizzeria to the Nora district.

Juliana's Pizza, a Brooklyn staple that's considered one of the best pizzas in the country, is slated to take space in Nora, the \$1 billion dining and entertainment district under construction just north of the downtown. This is the first location outside of New York for Juliana's signature coal-fired pizzeria.

"We're happy they're joining because they're best in class," said Francis X. Scire, head of leasing for Nora.

Juliana's expansion is another consequence of the pandemic-triggered migration boom to West Palm Beach from the Northeast.

Juliana's co-founder, Matthew Grogan, is a former Wall Street executive who moved to Palm Beach County during the pandemic. He said he had heard about Nora, cold-called the developers, and pitched them.

The Palm Beach Post



Nora's up-and-coming status in a slightly rough part of the city reminded Grogan of Brooklyn a dozen years ago, when the so-called Dumbo community was an overlooked and decidedly less-buzzy part of New York City.

"It's very similar," Grogan said. "Dumbo has changed over a decade to become incredibly popular."

Grogan said he considers Juliana's co-creator, Patsy Grimaldi, a pioneer who had a vision for Brooklyn's future and sees the same "vision" now in the plans to remake the West Palm community.

"And I think the guys at Nora have a vision, too," Grogan said. "West Palm Beach and Florida are booming, and we'd love to be a part of it."

The Palm Beach Post



Six dining venues announced so far at Nora. Here they are.

Also coming to Nora is another location of West Palm Beach-based Celis Juice Bar and Cafe, as well as a sports bar restaurant by the Garret Group of New York.

The three tenants will join a trio of other eateries previously announced for Nora, a new neighborhood being fashioned out of old warehouses and vacant lots.

Nora is short for North Railroad Avenue, the western boundary of the district that stretches from Seventh Street north to Palm Beach Lakes Boulevard.

Seven years ago, NDT Development of West Palm Beach bought property along the railroad tracks with the idea of turning the vintage buildings into restaurants, said NDT co-founder Ned Grace. Over time, plans grew bigger and bolder, and the concept became a neighborhood.

The Palm Beach Post



NDT partnered with Place Projects, an early developer of Miami's Wynwood, to help craft the vision, along with Wheelock Street Capital of Greenwich, Connecticut.

The Nora district now encompasses 40 acres, 13 to 15 of which the Nora development group owns.

During the past couple of years, Nora's tenant mix has taken on a decidedly New York flair, with four of six announced tenants now hailing from the Big Apple. In addition to Juliana's and Garret Group, H&H Bagels, an artisan bagel shop, and Van Leeuwen Ice Cream also are coming to Nora.

But nothing quite says New York like pizza.

Wall Street exec Grogan's journey: From pizza fan to co-owner

Juliana's was co-founded by New York pizza legend Grimaldi, who opened Grimaldi's Pizzeria in Brooklyn in 1990.

Eight years later, he sold the pizzeria and the name but retained a zest for the business.

The Palm Beach Post

Enter Grogan, a former Wall Street investment banker who fell in love with Grimaldi's Pizza and wanted to help Grimaldi and his late wife, Carol, open a new pizza joint, which they did in 2012. The venture, known for its smoky, slightly charred, thin-crust pies, is named after Grimaldi's mother, Maria "Juliana" Lancieri Grimaldi.



In 2015, TripAdvisor ranked Juliana's the No. 1 pizza in the country, and today the eatery remains a top destination for pizza lovers visiting New York.

Die-hard fans know that Juliana's and Grimaldi's are across the street from each other in the redeveloped Dumbo section of Brooklyn. Diners sometimes wait in long lines to get in, and some customers are known to do a taste test of both places in their quest for perfection in coal-fired dough, sauce and cheese.

For those pizza aficionados fussing that the water in West Palm Beach won't flavor the crust the same way as the water in New York, don't worry. Grogan said he hauled West Palm Beach's water to Brooklyn last year, had the chef make pizzas using water from each city, and then did a taste test.

The Palm Beach Post



None of the staff, not even co-owner Patsy Grimaldi, could tell one from the other, Grogan said.

Juliana's sells full pies only, no individual slices, but the menu offers a few other items, too, including salads and a couple of pasta dishes, plus desserts. Beer, wine and possibly liquor will be served, Grogan said.

A January 2025 opening is planned for the Juliana's in West Palm Beach, which will feature both indoor and outdoor seating.



The Palm Beach Post

High-end sports bar slated for dining destination at Nora in West Palm Beach

Meanwhile, the planned Garret Sports and Recreation at Nora is slated for a large space at Nora.

The restaurant will be similar in feel to a sister eatery in lower Manhattan called Rocco's Sport & Recreation, Scire said. Look for the high-end sports bar to feature more than two dozen televisions and a full menu.

The Garret Group is the owner of a variety of restaurant brands, including The Garret, Bandits Diner & Dive in the West Village, Borrachito Taqueria in Boston and more.

In addition to H&H Bagels, an artisan bagel shop, and Van Leeuwen Ice Cream, another eatery coming is Loco Taqueria & Oyster Bar. Loco's parent, Broadway Restaurant Group, revitalized the Broadway area in South Boston with five different restaurant concepts, creating a dining district that has attracted other restaurants to the neighborhood.

Broadway Restaurant partner Mike Shaw in September said the Nora warehouse space is reminiscent of South Boston. "It's an old building, which we like," Shaw said.

What's the timeline for Nora district in West Palm Beach?

Work has begun on Nora's first phase, the transformation of old warehouses along North Railroad Avenue into restaurants, offices, stores and gyms.

This part of the project is known as Nora's Main Street, and completion is slated for the end of 2024.

Some 13 buildings will make up the 154,000 square feet planned for Main Street, a phase expected to cost \$123 million. Of the 13 buildings, nine are rehabs of old structures, and four will be new construction.

Also coming to Nora: Boutique fitness brands Rumble and Solidcore.

Nora also will be home to a 201-key boutique hotel developed in partnership with BD Hotels and Sean MacPherson, behind some of New York City's most iconic hotels like The Bowery, Mercer, Chelsea Hotel and others.

The Palm Beach Post

Additionally, Nora's development team just began leasing the first phase of its creative office spaces on the second floor of the buildings along Railroad Avenue.

Offices range in size from 1,600 to 12,000 square feet.

Some of the spaces will be "spec" suites already built out and available for immediate use, Scire said.